



# County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax County

## NOTICE TO FAIRFAX CONNECTOR ROUTE 989 CUSTOMERS

This notice is provided to address the recent petition related to the planned service adjustments to CONNECTOR Route 989.

### **Why is the route being changed?**

Currently the buses run consistently late, and over-crowding occurs on some trips. The buses compete with the traffic along the Dulles Toll Road/I-66 corridor, both in-bound and out-bound, and observed arrival times at the Pentagon in the AM are consistently late. In addition, the dual destinations (Pentagon and Crystal City) present an inconvenience to some customers, and requests have been made to separate the two destinations into different routes.

### **When are the adjustments scheduled to begin?**

The effective date of the Route 989 route and schedule changes is Monday, October 2, 2006.

### **What are the planned service and schedule changes?**

Route 989 will be split into two new routes numbered 595 and 597 with new schedules for each. Route 595 will serve the Pentagon, and Route 597 will serve Crystal City. At the Reston East Park-and-Ride, 595 will be in Bay E and 597 in Bay D. Route 595 will still use Bay L3 at the Pentagon. Maps, schedules and other information on the new routes can be found at [www.fairfaxconnector.com](http://www.fairfaxconnector.com) under "Service Highlights".

### **What if these changes don't address my commuting needs?**

If the changes do not address your needs, customers could consider using bus and rail as an alternative. It is important to recognize that route 989 is a premium express service which duplicates MetroRail service along the same corridor and both – MetroRail and CONNECTOR Route 989 – are funded by Fairfax County and share identical destinations. Access from the Reston East Park and Ride facility to MetroRail service at the West Falls Church Metro Station is currently available via CONNECTOR Routes 551, 552, 554 and 557. While multiple transit choices are currently available to 989 riders, albeit not ideally convenient, there are other parts of the County which have limited, or no, public transit options.

### **What process was followed in advance of these changes?**

Beginning in August of 2005, the Fairfax County Department of Transportation (FCDOT) started examining alternatives for addressing schedule adherence and standing-load problems being experienced on Route 989. After a process that included a survey of customers in September, 2005, and a public meeting on March 1, 2006, FCDOT notified the public on August 24, 2006, of the alternative that is planned for October 2<sup>nd</sup>. This notification included a posting on the CONNECTOR web site under the *Service Highlights* banner, and direct notification was initiated, by e-mail, to the approximately 90-100 Route 989 customers for

whom we have an e-mail address. A contact for submitting comments on the decision was provided in the notice. Since the initial posting, the notice has been updated twice with answers to questions and comments received, with e-mail notifications of the updates made to customers in each instance. Finally, during the week of September 11, 2006, handouts summarizing all service changes planned for October 2006, including those affecting the 989, were distributed to customers.

Following the March public meeting and after taking all comments into consideration, FCDOT evaluated various route and schedule alternatives and determined that a reasonably satisfactory solution could not be achieved without adding resources to the route, which were not available. FCDOT conveyed that determination to Supervisor Catherine Hudgins on May 26, 2006, with the recommendation that either 1) Route 989 be discontinued and its resources be transferred to other routes needing additional resources, or 2) resources from another route(s) be transferred to Route 989.

Supervisor Hudgins elected the second option, and it was mutually agreed that Route 504 would be recommended for discontinuance due to its poor performance provided 1) that the proposal was not found to be flawed by either the public or the Board of Supervisors, and 2) that Route 574 would be improved to help offset the impacts of discontinuing Route 504. Improving Route 574 is warranted because it will be the only route serving Reston and Tysons Corner after 504 is discontinued.

As FCDOT cannot unilaterally discontinue a route, FCDOT notified the Board of Supervisors on June 27, 2006, of the proposal to discontinue Route 504 and initiated a public involvement process on the matter which included a public meeting conducted on July 11, 2006. As a result of this process, the decision was made to discontinue 504 and reallocate its two buses and some of its service hours to 989, and the remainder of its service hours to 574.

**Why does it seem like service is reduced (interval increase, exacerbate overcrowding, travel times, etc.) when additional buses have been added to the service?**

This comes from splitting the route to serve separate destinations and the adjustments made to travel times. Both these changes – separate destinations and travel times – were made in an effort to address customer comments, balanced with current resources.

If the one-route option was retained, 15-minute trip frequencies could be provided as they are now, however, this would continue the standing-load problem. The addition of buses from the discontinued Route 504 does not translate into additional trips or more frequent service, under this one-route scenario, due to the adjustments necessary to keep buses running on schedule. Therefore splitting the route into two will potentially split current loads such that standing loads will be mitigated. Splitting the route also provides Crystal City customers with a dedicated route as they requested through the public comment process.

When splitting the route to two destinations, trips can be provided no more frequently than every 30 minutes. However, 30 minutes is an appropriate frequency in cases where customers' report and leave work times are on the hour and half hour. This appears to be the case for the 989 customers based on the survey conducted last year. Accordingly, the schedules for the new routes have been developed to get customers to and from work on the hour and half hour.

The standing-load problem could be resolved under the single route model by running buses in tandem during the narrow AM and PM time bands within which most of the 989 passenger trips are made. However, that would require eliminating the earlier trips to which many customers are accustomed, as well as the earlier AM trip that has been added to the Route 595 schedule as requested by customers through the comments process. Given the time that it takes buses to make round trips, it is not possible to provide early trips and still have enough buses on hand to run tandem trips when demand is greatest. This dilemma supports the decision to go to the two route alternative.

It is true that the new schedules increase travel times. This is due to additional time being added to both the revenue and "deadhead legs" of each trip to address the schedule adherence problem, and to provide customers sufficient time to walk to and from their work locations. Additional "dead time" is required given traffic volumes traveling westbound in the AM and eastbound in the PM, which negatively impacts the ability to assign second trips to the already allocated buses.

The amount of walk time is based on comments received from customers during the comment process. If monitoring finds that too much time has been added to the schedules, they will be adjusted accordingly. It is also true that the last PM bus will not be on I-66 before expiration of the HOV hours. However, this bus will be running the later trip that customers requested through the comment process.

In summary, alternatives are limited by technical issues that drive the decision to split 989 into two routes. These cannot be overcome except by adding even more resources to the route, which are not available. (Resources currently allocated to south county Pentagon Route 380 have been identified for allocation to other south county routes, and a public process to implement this change will be undertaken this fiscal year.) For these reasons, it was decided to proceed with the Route 989 changes on October 2, 2006, as planned, monitor their effects and adjust as warranted.

#### **Will another public hearing be held on this matter?**

There is no reference in any materials from the Public meeting on March 1, 2006, that mention plans to hold a second public meeting. There was a summary of comments from the public meeting posted on the CONNECTOR web site following the meeting, and it did not include a reference to another public meeting.

Although there is no reference in the record committing FCDOT to hold a second public meeting, we would be happy to meet informally with the 989 customers. However, we believe such a meeting will be more productive if it is held after the changes have taken place and both customers and FCDOT have had an opportunity to assess the effects of the changes.

**What happens if the new schedule and route does not meet expectations?**

Once new service is implemented, we monitor the service to ensure it meets the needs of our customers, and make adjustments accordingly, within existing resources. Input from our customers is a great resource and we depend on it as an important part of the planning and implementation process.

Thank you for your understanding of the issues that this service challenge has presented.

Should you have any questions, comments, desire additional information, need further clarification please feel free to contact us through the FAIRFAX CONNECTOR web site at [www.fairfaxconnector.com](http://www.fairfaxconnector.com) or via the Telephone Information Center at 703-339-7200.